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Navajo President Shelly Calls the Sequester an Opportunity for Indian Nations



Tribal leaders that participated in the Economic and Energy Challenges and Opportunities for Indian Country round table discussion. Left to right: Ernie Stevens, chairman of the National Indian Gaming Association; Susan Masten, co-president of Women Empowering Women for Indian Nations; Jefferson Keel, president of the National Congress of American Indians; (front center) Tina Danforth, delegate for the Native American Finance Officers Association and treasure of the Onieda Tribe of Indians of Wisconsin; (back center) Tex Hall, chairman of the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikira Nation; Ben Shelly, president of the Navajo Nation; Derrick Watchman, chief executive officer of the Navajo Nation Gaming Enterprise; and Roger Fragua, president of COTA Holdings LLC.

SANDIA PUEBLO, N.M. – Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly said the federal sequestration is an opportunity for American Indian nations to reduce federal red tape because tribal nations depend upon the federal government for funding.

“We’re part of the deficit. Give me the power to become more energy independent,” President Shelly said during opening remarks of a tribal leaders round table

discussion at the Developing Tribal Energy Resources and Economies Conference Tuesday morning. The two day conference ended on Wednesday.

“We have the opportunity to shoot a big buck,” President Shelly said.

President Shelly participated in a round table discussion that included leaders from throughout the country.

Some of the topics the panel spoke regarded protecting tribal culture while developing energy, gaining more young people involved with government, and other topics regarding tribal economies.

“I think that people need to bring productive solutions is really key,” said Tex Hall, chairman of the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikira.

As for getting more young people involved with policy, President Shelly said policy change and allowing younger professionals a chance would help bring younger people into government.

“Tribal leaders need to look at their tribal policies,” President Shelly said.

He added that some Navajo college graduates aren’t qualified for positions at the Navajo Nation because of existing policies. Though legislation is being prepared to address the issue, President Shelly said change is difficult.

“We are trying to amend it. It’s tough. It’s like trying to pull out an old tree with a lot of old roots,” President Shelly said.

Another way to address engagement of young people into government is giving them the opportunity to do so.

“Some of us need to step aside and let the young people come up,” President Shelly said.

Derrick Watchman, chief executive at Navajo Nation Gaming Enterprise, responded to a statement that interoffice politics might be a reason why young people aren’t interested in tribal positions.

“It’s political no matter where you go,” Watchman said, adding that most of his working experience is working for large corporations.

Watchman said one solution that could be helpful is creating more internships for college students in tribal offices.

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